

Dear Friends:

The observance of Black History Month provides a wonderful opportunity for us to reflect on the roles that African-Americans have played in shaping the economic, political, cultural, and social landscape of the United States and particularly South Carolina.

The history of this celebration is as interesting as many of the contributions of those we'll recognize over the next few weeks.

**Dr. Carter G. Woodson**, considered the Father of Black History, was disturbed to find that history books largely ignored the African-American population. He sought to correct some of the stereotypical misinformation about the lives and history of Americans of African descent, writing African-Americans into the nation's history and founding Negro History Week, the precursor to our current observance. Woodson felt that "those who have no record of what their forebears have accomplished lose the inspiration which comes from the teaching of biography and history."

A son of former slaves, **Dr. Woodson** spent his childhood working in coal mines and quarries and received his education during the four- to five-month term that was customary for African-American schools at the time. He was denied access to public education in the Virginia town where he was born, so he taught himself English and mathematics. During his late teens, he entered a West Virginia high school, completing a four-year curriculum in just two years. He went on to receive his master's degree in history from the University of Chicago and to earn his doctorate from Harvard University.

One of Dr. Woodson's statements has always resonated with me. He said, "The educational system of a country is worthless unless it revolutionizes the social order." I am proud that the South Carolina Department of Education has risen to that challenge, serving as the lead agency for integrating the African American experience within the K-12 curriculum and providing classroom resources to educators statewide.

One of those resources is **South Carolina African-American History Online** and its annual calendar. The 2008 version marks the nineteenth year that AT&T has spearheaded this initiative, offering a method of identifying African-American role models for all youth, honoring notable African-American achievers with ties to South Carolina, and providing a vehicle with which our rigorous standards in every subject area can be aligned. The calendar's timeline and resource sections offer parents, teachers, and students starting points for additional research and study.

Two of this year's role models are **Harry Carson** of Florence, one of history's most remarkable professional football players, and **Josephine Wood** of Cherokee County, a retired teacher who before integration helped raise money to purchase a bus to transport African-American children to school.

Their biographies and the stories and contributions of so many others demonstrate to our students that their futures are not defined by skin color, background, or the piece of land on which their house sits.

Finally, these calendar stories teach all of us – this month and always – that ordinary people, despite obstacles and through hard work, can do extraordinary things.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex  
State Superintendent of Education